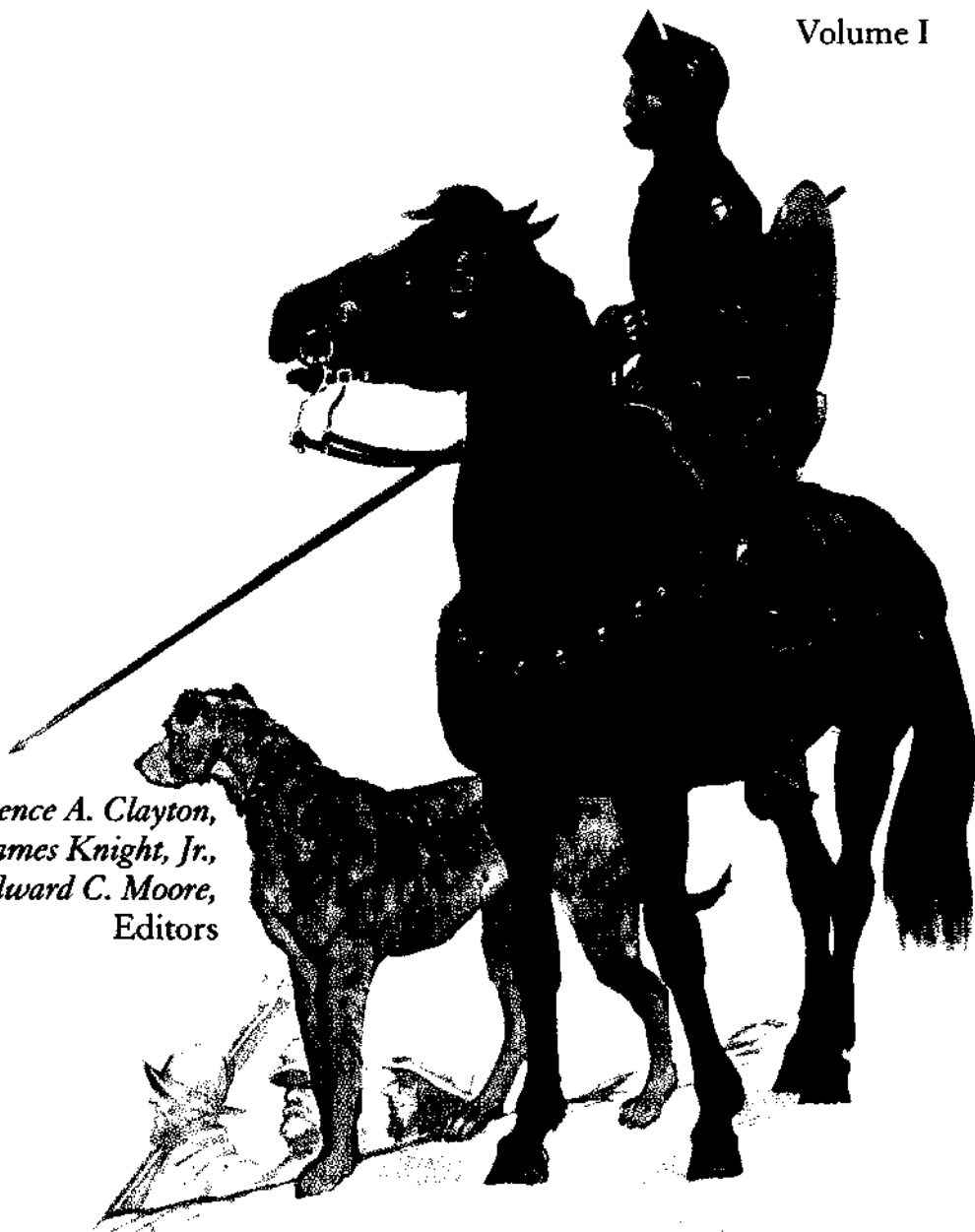


The De Soto Chronicles

The Expedition of Hernando de Soto
to North America in 1539-1543

Volume I

*Lawrence A. Clayton,
Hernon James Knight, Jr.,
and Edward C. Moore,
Editors*



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Soto Chronicles

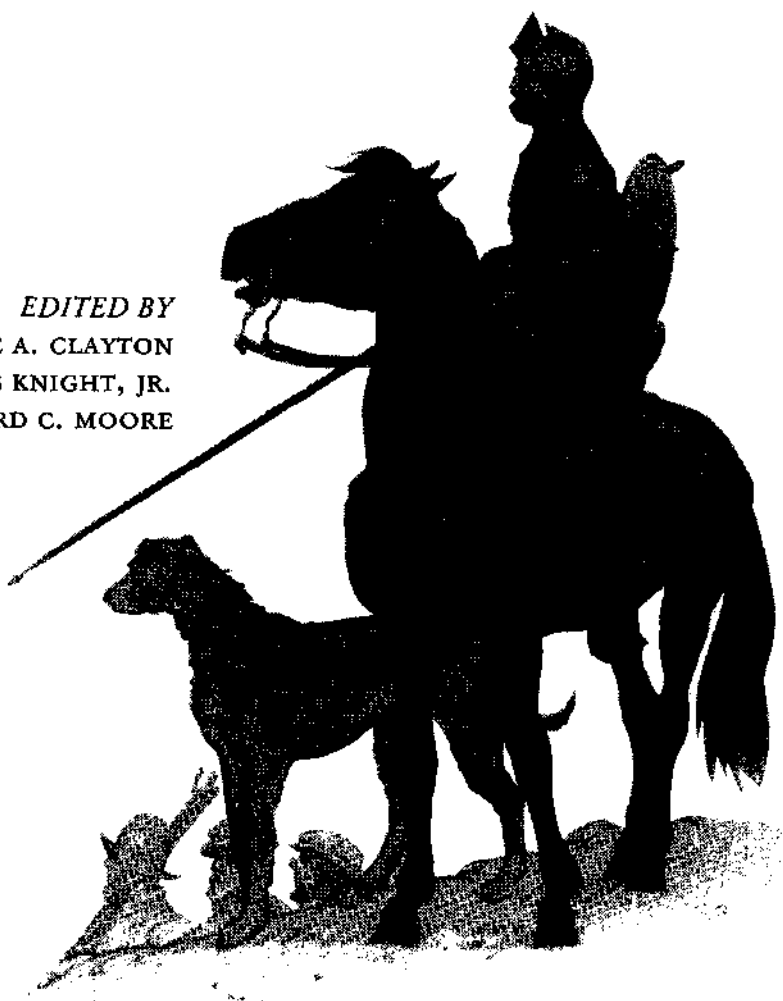
DE SOTO TO NORTH AMERICA IN 1539-1543

EDITED BY

LAWRENCE A. CLAYTON

VERNON JAMES KNIGHT, JR.

EDWARD C. MOORE



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DOUGLAS E. JONES

Chairman of the Alabama De Soto Commission
and of
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Hernando de Soto, ca. 1493-1542
(From the Library of Congress copy of
Retratos de los Españoles ilustres
con un epítome de sus vidas [Madrid, 1791])

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Foreword

by Lawrence A. Clayton

The De Soto expedition forms an integral part of the great age of discovery and conquest in the Americas triggered by the Columbian voyages. In the wake of Columbus there came other explorers and conquistadors who pushed through the islands of the Caribbean and into the American mainlands during the first half of the sixteenth century. They came as explorers and discoverers, as conquerors and settlers, spreading the best and the worst of European civilization through the Americas.

A great part of the Western world's interest in commemorating the Columbian voyages has been in how to assess the long-range impact of Europe on America. In this clash, new peoples and new cultures were born, and ancient peoples and indigenous cultures were destroyed. The De Soto expedition was the first major encounter of Europeans with North American Indians in the eastern half of the United States and, as such, is of monumental importance in the study and analysis of the origins of North American history after the arrival of the Europeans.

In the years 1989-93, the United States commemorated the 450th anniversary of the expedition of Hernando de Soto to the southeastern United States. De Soto and his expedition of over six hundred men, including two hundred cavalry, spent four years (1539-43) traveling through what is now Florida, Georgia, Alabama, North and South Carolina, Tennessee, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Texas. De Soto discovered the Mississippi River, died of a fever, and was buried in the river.

As leader of the first European penetration into the interior of the area, then called La Florida, De Soto saw American Indians in their native towns and with their native customs, untouched, as yet, by foreign people. Accordingly, scholars have found the accounts of the De Soto expedition to be of major importance in understanding the Native Americans and their way of life. De Soto's army spent six months in Alabama. They traveled over five hundred miles of Indian trails in the process and had their greatest battle in

Alabama. For these reasons especially, Alabama has always had a great interest in De Soto.

For anthropologists and archaeologists, the surviving De Soto chronicles are uniquely valued for the ethnological information they contain. These documents are the only detailed eyewitness record of the most advanced native cultural achievement in North America—the Mississippian culture—a culture that vanished in the wake of European contact. Scholars are now engaged in the exciting prospect of uniting the ethnological record displayed in the De Soto chronicles with modern archaeological, historical, and linguistic findings in order to yield the first comprehensive picture of southeastern Mississippian Indian chiefdoms at the time of European contact.

For the historical record, the De Soto *entrada* initiated a long period of intermittent contact between Europeans and Native Americans during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. De Soto's failures did not deter the Spanish from planting frontier outposts to protect their growing empire in Mexico and the Caribbean. St. Augustine, 1565, was perhaps the most famous, but it was followed by small missions and presidios that dotted the Southeast in the seventeenth century.

The Spanish, and their European rivals for colonial empire, vied for the control and loyalty of Native Americans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as Spaniards, Frenchmen, and Englishmen jockeyed for empire.

The Amerindian peoples, caught in this tangle of European rivalry, were but a ghostly specter of the densely populated, well-organized Indian chiefdoms encountered by De Soto and his men in 1539-43. With De Soto marched the sickle of diseases that cut down Amerindians with no immunities. Part of the Columbian legacy was not only the conquest and assimilation of native peoples, not only the creation of new races through miscegenation, not only the bringing of Christianity, but a terrible destruction brought on by disease and by the demoralizing defeats at the hands of the Europeans.

De Soto's expedition was one of those primary events in the transformation of North American life initiated by the Columbian voyages, and it is within this context that we view the accounts included in these volumes as being of extraordinary importance.

Preface

We have gathered in these two volumes English translations of the basic documents relating to the expedition of Hernando de Soto to the present-day United States in the years 1539-43.

In contrast to previous editions, where the items were published separately, at various times, and by various publishers, the four primary accounts of the expedition and some relevant supplementary documents have been included here. They appear in a single compact form, newly annotated, and with literary and historical introductions. As such, they should be readily available to scholars and to the general public alike.

Of the four primary accounts, one was originally written in Portuguese and three in Spanish. The one in Portuguese by the "Gentleman from Elvas" had a fine translation in 1933 and we use that translation. The remaining three appear in new translations. Two of them, the accounts by Luis Hernández de Biedma and Rodrigo Rangel, are most commonly referred to in translations published in 1866 and 1904, respectively. The third—the Garcilaso de la Vega account—was most recently done in 1951. Nevertheless, a new translation of the Garcilaso account by a leading scholar in the field was discovered recently, and we publish that translation for the first time. In sum, all three of the Spanish chronicles appear in new translations, newly annotated.

The classic literary account of the expedition, *La Florida*, was written by the Peruvian mestizo Garcilaso de la Vega, the Inca. This long, colorful narrative possesses an unchallenged literary quality lacking in the other three accounts. It has survived the ages and has been translated and republished many times in French, German, and English since first appearing in Spanish in 1605 in Lisbon, Portugal. Like other works by Garcilaso, it is considered by many to be a literary masterpiece. Its historical accuracy has not been so widely praised, however.

When we came upon a new translation several years ago in English, and

realized the translation had never been published, we decided to include it in this volume. The translation, done by a supremely well qualified Hispanist, Dr. Charmion Shelby, more than half a century ago, essentially takes up volume two of *The De Soto Chronicles*.

We realize that a great deal of controversy, both contemporary and modern, surrounds Garcilaso de la Vega's works: controversy over sources he used, over the literary merit versus the historical accuracy of his works, over his life and its significance as a mestizo son of a Spanish conquistador and an Inca noblewoman. He was, in essence, the first of a new race of people born of unions between the Spanish conquerors and the Native American peoples they conquered, and his perspective colored the way he wrote about Hernando de Soto. Accordingly, we asked a modern Garcilaso de la Vega scholar, Dr. Frances Crowley, to write an extended introduction to Garcilaso, and a Spanish specialist, Dr. David Bost, to review and edit the Shelby translation by comparing her work against the original. The results are volume two. We trust the reader will find Garcilaso as much of a "page turner" as have previous generations, providing us with insights into the age of the conquerors.

The other three chronicles form the bulk of volume one of *The De Soto Chronicles*. The longest of these three was written by an unknown gentleman from the Portuguese city of Elvas who marched with De Soto in the expedition. The other two are shorter accounts, one produced by Hernández de Biedma, the king's factor on the expedition, and the second by Rodrigo Rangel, De Soto's private secretary.

As with the Garcilaso de la Vega account, we have new translations of the Biedma and Rangel accounts. Both were translated for this work by a young scholar, John Worth, whose anthropological training has been supplemented by indispensable experience in the General Archive of the Indies in Spain with original Spanish documents. John combines the best training of two disciplines—anthropology and history—and his annotations, reviewed by one of his professors, Dr. Charles Hudson of the University of Georgia, reflect a sensitivity to both areas.

Acknowledgments

Thanks are due to the Alabama Museum of Natural History at The University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa—a town named after the great war chief Tascaluça, who figures so prominently in the accounts of the De Soto expedition. The editors wish to express their appreciation for the extensive assistance provided by the museum and its director, Dr. Douglas E. Jones, who, as chairman of the Alabama De Soto Commission, originally suggested this project, and to the assistant director for administration, Dr. Edward C. Moore.

Thanks are also due to The University of Alabama's Latin American Studies Program and to the History Department, which made the time of historian Dr. Lawrence A. Clayton available to serve as an editor; to the Department of Anthropology, which supported the services of a member of its faculty, Dr. Vernon James Knight, Jr., to serve as an editor; to Dr. Edward H. Moseley, director of the Capstone International Program Center, for his continuing support; to Dr. Spurgeon Baldwin, chairman of the Department of Romance Languages and Classics, for assistance with Spanish materials; and to Dr. Joseph Sánchez, director of the Spanish Colonial Research Center at the University of New Mexico, who provided us with insights into several of the De Soto documents.

Our contributing editors and the members of our board of advisers are listed on other pages of this volume, but we would be remiss if we did not acknowledge their support and assistance during every phase of the project. All busy scholars, with many demands on their time, they were always present when we needed them, and their enthusiasm for the project sustained its driving force during some difficult days. We are grateful and we thank them.

Other persons to whom we are indebted include Kathleen T. Baxter, reference archivist in the National Anthropological Archives of the National Museum of Natural History at the Smithsonian Institution, for assistance in locating the Charmion Shelby translation of *La Florida* in the papers of Dr.

John Swanton; Jane Garner, archivist at the General Libraries of the University of Texas at Austin, for providing help in reviewing the Charmion Shelby papers in the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection there and for providing us with a microfilm copy of the 1605 edition of *La Florida*; John H. Hébert, director of the Quincentenary Program of the Library of Congress, for biographical information concerning Dr. Shelby; Dean Joyce Lamont and Andrea Watson, special collections archivists at The University of Alabama Library, for assistance in many ways; Dr. Jeffrey P. Brain of Harvard University and Dr. John C. Hall of the Alabama Museum of Natural History at The University of Alabama for assistance with illustrations; Charles M. Hudson of the University of Georgia; Richard Hite, Superintendent of the De Soto National Memorial, Bradenton, Florida, for advice and counseling; Eduardo Kortright for assistance in translating material from the Spanish; Anne R. Gibbons for preparing the indexes for both volumes; and two students who have helped on this project, Lisa Zimmerman at Furman University who assisted Dr. Bost in checking the Shelby translation and Anna Bryan who worked on a preliminary index for *La Florida*.

No project as complex as this one could ever be brought to print without extensive assistance from the publisher. We are very grateful to the staff of The University of Alabama Press, and to its director, Malcolm M. MacDonald, who gave the project unswerving support.

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and Cornell University Library for permission to print Delisle's map of Louisiana.

Notes on Translations and Names

Four full narratives that were produced in the years following the De Soto expedition have survived. One of these is known simply as the Elvas account because its author only identified himself as a Portuguese gentleman from Elvas. A second is that of Rodrigo Rangel, private secretary to De Soto. The third, "presented in the year 1544 to the King of Spain in Council," was written by Luis Hernández de Biedma, factor for the king. The fourth account, *La Florida*, was completed by the Inca, Garcilaso de la Vega, in 1591, although it was not published until 1605. It is generally thought to have been based on interviews with Gonzalo Sylvestre, an officer under De Soto and a survivor of the expedition. These four accounts are customarily referred to as Elvas, Rangel, Biedma, and Garcilaso (or the Inca).

The four accounts have had an erratic publishing history and an even less orderly translation history. The classic translation of Elvas, by Dr. James Alexander Robertson, was published in 1933 by the Yale University Press for the Florida State Historical Society. It was a limited edition of only 360 copies. It is still the most recent translation.

Garcilaso's *La Florida* is currently available in a translation by John and Jeannette Varner, published by the University of Texas Press in 1951.

Recently, there have been expressions of concern by scholars that most of the available translations were not literal enough to be really satisfactory, particularly for the needs of archaeologists and anthropologists. We have tried to meet this concern by being more literal in these translations.

Accordingly, we use the Robertson version of Elvas. This account, written originally in Portuguese, is currently out of print. It was completed by Robertson, then secretary of the Florida State Historical Society, in 1933 for that society and was published by the Yale University Press. It had excellent reviews at the time of its publication, and we see little likelihood of improving on it. At the time it appeared, Lesley Byrd Simpson wrote (*Hispanic American Historical Review* 14, no. 3 (August 1934): 346-48), "Dr. Rob-

ertson's method is to preserve the style of the original by reproducing in English as closely as possible, word for word, the Portuguese text. . . . This book is a monument of patient and thorough scholarship." To bring Robertson's material up to the current state of De Soto scholarship, Robertson's notes have been updated for this volume by Dr. John H. Hann.

For our version of the Garcilaso chronicle, we have identified in the National Anthropological Archives at the Smithsonian Institution a previously unpublished translation. Garcilaso's *La Florida* is the longest of the four accounts and occupies most of our second volume. This new translation was done by Dr. Clair Charmion Shelby for the 1935 U.S. De Soto Expedition Commission. In the final report of that commission, Dr. John Swanton, chairman of the commission, wrote, "The Commission employed Dr. Charmion Shelby, of Austin, Tex., an experienced translator of documents in sixteenth century Spanish, to provide an accurate translation of *La Florida of the Inca*. This translation covers 910 typewritten pages, double-spaced" (Swanton, John R., *Final Report of the United States De Soto Expedition Commission*, Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1939; reprint the Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985, p. viii).

Dr. Shelby was indeed an experienced translator. She had earned a doctorate in Spanish history under Professor Charles Wilson Hackett at the University of Texas. She was cotranslator with him of *Pichardo's Treatise on the Limits of Louisiana and Texas*, a two-volume work, and was translator of the original documents for Professor Hackett's monumental *Revolt of the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico*. Dr. Shelby worked for thirteen years, until her death in 1955, as a reference librarian for the Hispanic Division of the Library of Congress.

Shelby's translation of *La Florida* was not published because Congress did not fund many of the projects of the 1935 Commission. At a later date (1950), the Hakluyt Society of England proposed to publish her translation and had it scheduled for publication when the Varner edition was published by the University of Texas Press. In the light of that, the Hakluyt Society dropped its plans for publication.

We believe interested parties should have both translations available. The Varners performed a great service to scholars in publishing the first complete English translation of *La Florida*, but Dr. Shelby was an expert in sixteenth-century Spanish, and her translation will give us the first translation of the longest chronicle done by a scholar whose expertise was in Spanish of the sixteenth century. It was edited for this book by Dr. David Bost of Furman University with notes by Dr. Vernon James Knight, Jr., of The University

of Alabama. The editors have made a few small corrections in places where Garcilaso's table of contents does not exactly match his chapter headings and enumeration.

We are greatly indebted to Dr. Bost, who not only checked the Shelby translation of Garcilaso word-for-word against the 1605 edition but also found time in his schedule to translate for us the several documents from the General Archive of the Indies in Seville, which appear in volume one of these *De Soto Chronicles*.

The account by Garcilaso de la Vega was first published in Lisbon in 1605. A second edition was published in 1723. Dr. Shelby used the 1605 edition, with reference where necessary to the 1723 edition. Because Garcilaso was not a member of the expedition, and his version is thought to be based on what he was told many years later by Gonzalo Sylvestre, it is considered to be the least accurate of the four. In addition to what he was told by Sylvestre, Garcilaso says he had access to accounts by two other members of the expedition, Alonso de Carmona and Juan Coles. Their accounts have not survived except in quotations by Garcilaso.

We also owe thanks to Dr. Frances Crowley of Southeast Missouri State University for the version of Garcilaso's *Genealogy of Garci Perez de Vargas*, which appears as an appendix to volume two. This document appears here in English for the first time. Dr. Crowley identified the *Genealogy* in the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid and translated it for our use.

The two shorter accounts, by Rangel and by Biedma, are translated anew for this edition by John Worth at the University of Florida at Gainesville with annotation support from Dr. Charles Hudson of the University of Georgia.

The account by Rodrigo Rangel, De Soto's secretary, is a detailed itinerary covering the first three years of the expedition. This account was not published until 1851, when it appeared in Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo's *Historia general y natural de las Indias*. Our translation was made from Oviedo's *Historia*.

The account by Biedma, the king's representative on the expedition, is the only one for which the original manuscript has survived. We have based our translation on a photostatic copy of that manuscript. Although the manuscript was written in 1544, it was only published in 1857 by Buckingham Smith.

We owe special thanks to Dr. Paul E. Hoffman of Louisiana State University, whose extensive knowledge of the history of the period and of the Spanish language was frequently drawn upon.

In preparing his translation of Elvas, Dr. Robertson added an extensive collection of notes. We have reproduced these in full, at the end of the Elvas account, because they are a valuable part of Robertson's work. In addition, we have had them updated for this present work by Dr. John H. Hann, who has also provided some of his own original notes, which appear as footnotes in our volume. Dr. Hann's original notes cover points distinct from those made by Robertson and originated from his comparative reading of Robertson's translation with the original Portuguese text. Some minor additional updating of Robertson's notes has also been done by Dr. Vernon James Knight, Jr. Dr. Knight's notes are identified with VJK in brackets. The editors have taken the liberty to standardize the name Hernando de Soto from the normal usage of "Fernando" in the original text.

Some minor alterations in quotations from the Portuguese have been made to accommodate the style of modern fonts and spellings. Where Elvas used the tilde ~ in certain cases (*q* with a tilde, *hu* or *hua* with a tilde over the *u*, *e* with a tilde to indicate the dropping of a following *n*, and *d* with a tilde to indicate the dropping of a following *e*), modern usage has been adopted.

Another thorny problem is that of names—both Indian names and Spanish names. The Indians had no written alphabet at this time in their history. Accordingly, when one of the chroniclers heard the name of a town or a person, he translated it into his own alphabet as well as he could. Partly for this reason, the same Indian person or town will be called by different names in different chronicles. We adopted John Swanton's solution in his report for the 1935 U.S. De Soto Expedition Commission; he included a table showing the various Indian proper names used in the four chronicles. We have reproduced his table of names within volume one. Nevertheless, variant spellings of the same name often appear in the same source document—and even on the same page. Where this occurs, we have not selected among the alternatives but have reproduced the variants as found in our original authors.

A somewhat different problem presents itself with Spanish surnames when they are preceded by the word *de*. The general rule is to use lowercase for the *de* except at the beginning of a sentence. We have followed this rule for all names except that of *De Soto* when it stands alone without the first name. The usage *De Soto* has become such a common term in English that we consider it preferable to *de Soto* when standing by itself.

We have also made some slight changes in punctuation and capitalization to follow modern practices. For example, a comma may have been added before "and" in a series of three or more items, and a word in a chapter title may have been capitalized.